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Sent: Fri 3/15/2013 3:47:52 PM

Subject: South Bergenite: Polluters to pay for bike, walking path on river banks

http://www.northjersey.com/news/197919481_Polluters_to_pay_for_bike_walking_path_on_river_banks.html?page=all

Polluters to pay for bike, walking path on river banks

THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2013

BY MEGHAN GRANT

STAFF WRITER

SOUTH BERGENITE

The banks of the Passaic River will see the development of a 2-mile new walk and bike path from the existing Riverside County Park to the Route 3 bridge.

"It really is a joint project between us and Lyndhurst," said Ella Filippone, Executive Director of the Passaic River Coalition.

Funding will be provided in part by the Lower Passaic Cooperating Parties Group (CPG), an organization made up of 70 companies identified by federal environmental officials as responsible for years of contamination of the river's mudflats. This winter, the CPG announced it was awarding a \$50,000 grant for the path to Lyndhurst and the Coalition. Funding is made possible as a part of the organization's Community Improvement Fund.

"It'll give residents a little space for jogging or other recreation, and it does enhance the area tremendously," Township Parks and Recreation Commissioner Tom DiMaggio said. "Right now it's just an unsightly area filled with rotten trees and other overgrowth."

Beginning from the county-operated park to the Route 3 bridge on the Lyndhurst-Rutherford border, the trail would serve as a path for bicycles and walkers. The idea was first proposed a year ago and will be realized now that the grant has been obtained.

Over the course of 2013, the largest obstacles for the project will be obtaining all the adjoining parcels of land to create an unbroken path and turning the overgrown properties into a manicured park.

The Coalition already owns some property along the river within the township. A small park home to a T-ball court for autistic players close to Riverside County Park is owned by the Passaic River Coalition, Filippone said.

"As you go up river toward the Route 3 bridge, there's a lot here and there that we [the Coalition] own and lots the

township owns," Filippone said. About seven or eight lots are owned by private individuals.

Some of those privately-owned lands have tax liens on them, Filippone pointed out, and the Coalition intends to use the grant money to acquire the properties.

"These pieces are all very small, it's hard to tell where they are from a map," said Filippone.

The Coalition also has a \$90,000 Bergen County grant carried over for several years that will be put towards the project. The CPG amount will satisfy the county's requirement for a match, the director explained. Between the latest CPG grant and additional funding promised by the group, the Coalition believes it has the money needed to purchase the remaining parcels.

Right now the Coalition is trying to determine if the parking areas along Riverside Avenue used by nearby residents are privately owned or on Coalition or municipal property.

"I have a feeling that there could be a parking area on property we already own, and we need to work that out with the people who are using the spaces to park," Filippone said.

When the Coalition renovated the last park, the organization allowed the parking area to remain for the convenience of the residents across the street, some of whom were very upset about the possibility of losing that space.

An engineering company is locating the neighborhood's exact property lines and will get in touch with residents around springtime to resolve any issues that arise, the director said.

Markers may be put up to identify the lines and where park workers can't go.

Lyndhurst's role is limited at this stage since most of the parcels are owned by the Coalition, DiMaggio said. The township will have a say once designs are being drafted, he added.

Currently the land is overrun with weeds and brush and contains debris which would need to be removed first, Filippone said. Other physical obstacles in place are the erosion that's taken place in some locations, the gullies and the base of the railroad bridge. Any monies left over after the purchase of property would be put towards landscaping and other work. The project may need to collaborate with the state to get the neighborhood's gullies filled in or build small bridges across.

Once a design blueprint is in place, the Coalition is eligible for another CPG grant to develop the park by putting down a walk and bike way and to plant trees and other foliage. In the past, the Coalition held a June cleanup day with the employees of Anheuser-Busch to revitalize the property on the Passaic River, the director said. Plans aren't final yet but the company has expressed interest in returning.

According to CPG spokesperson Jonathan Jaffe, the CPG has also funded other area environmental projects like rehabilitation work at the Nereid Boat Club in Rutherford and the green technology catch basin in North Arlington.

At the completion of the construction, the park will be turned over to Lyndhurst, which would be responsible for maintenance.

"As part of our agreement, we'll maintain trees and planting," DiMaggio said.

The Passaic River Coalition has worked successfully with Lyndhurst in the past to bring recreational space to the township.

During the revitalization to the 1-acre park, the municipality was "100 percent with us," including utilizing Public Works manpower and machinery, Filippone said.

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